

**Scenic road or super-highway?: Identifying stakeholders and analyzing perceptions
of community impact in the red-rock-region of Northern Arizona**

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Applied Sociology

June, 2004

Approved by

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1.0 ABSTRACT

The purpose of this investigation is to analyze stakeholders' perceptions of community impact surrounding the transformation of Scenic Route 179 in Sedona, Arizona. To present a community impact assessment of this decision-making process, my syncretic approach is to: (1) assess the *community-field* under investigation via the *interorganizational* and *interactional* perspectives; (2) identify *stakeholders* and key *power actors* via a combination of the *Positional*, *Reputational*, *Decisional*, and *Social Participation* power identification methods; and (3) extract *community impact* themes based upon the perceptions of identified *stakeholders* and key *power actors* who are involved with the community decision-making process.

Scenic Route 179 has been and remains an integral aspect of Sedona, Arizona's community. Ultimately, the decisions of a few individuals networked within stakeholder organizations will determine the fate of Scenic Route 179. Therefore, I have identified the stakeholder organizations and key power actors with jurisdictional responsibility and authority over the scenic byway. Identified stakeholder organizations/power actors participated in topic-focused interviews (primary data) and focus groups (secondary data). Subsequently, qualitative data was analyzed and classified into recurring community impact themes relating to the transformation of Scenic Route 179 in Northern Arizona. Relying upon the inductive model, this applied community research endeavor is both a descriptive and exploratory investigation that utilizes community power theories to assess the impact of a decision-making process on the community of Sedona, Arizona. Furthermore, this investigation will present a methodological template sociologists may employ when assessing community impact as it pertains to localized decision-making processes in any given community.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The setting of this investigation is the red-rock-region of Sedona, Arizona located in the mountainous northern section of the state. In a recent *USA Today* article (May 16-18, 2003), Sedona was considered “the most beautiful place in America.” Within this unique red-rock-region of the American southwest lies a designated scenic byway known as Scenic Route 179 (SR 179).¹ Traveling 14.49 miles southeast from Sedona, SR 179 connects the communities of Northern Arizona to the red-rock-region of the Coconino National Forest.² This colubrine scenic byway is a critical component of the community’s character as it meanders through ancient red-rock formations (Ranney 1993), historic landmarks, residential neighborhoods, and local merchant areas. However, over the last ten years, a community conflict regarding the expansion of SR 179 manifested. Under the microscope of an intense community decision-making process, *stakeholders* and *key power actors*,³ of Northern Arizona, will ultimately decide whether to transform the current 2-lane scenic byway into a larger 5-lane highway or an improved 2-lane scenic road.

Regarding the decision-making process under investigation, two classifications of stakeholders have been identified: (1) agency stakeholders and (2) community stakeholders. *Agency stakeholders* are the government organizations with jurisdictional responsibility and authority along SR 179. While *community stakeholders* are the non-governmental groups representing various facets of Sedona, Arizona’s community and who will be affected socially by the transformation of SR 179.

According to Webster’s dictionary, “community” is defined merely as “(1) a group living in the same area or having common interests, work, etc. in common; (2) the general public; (3) a sharing in common.” However, this researcher believes the idea of “community” extends

¹ Coconino County Comprehensive Planning Partnership: *Community Character - Draft 2*. 2003. “The **Red Rock Scenic Road** is a state scenic byway designated in February 1987. The route travels SR 179 from Sedona southeast through the Coconino National Forest.”

² Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT).

³ Individuals who have social power and who exercise that power in making community decisions.

beyond this definition. I believe that “community” is best defined as the interdependence and interaction of the environment, residents, economy, and character. Therefore, I have identified four elements of community impact that make the transformation of SR 179 both salient and critical to the community of Sedona, Arizona:

- (1) Environmental
- (2) Residential
- (3) Economic
- (4) Community Character

This investigation holds that the elements of a “community” are impacted by decision-making processes, and ultimately the stakeholders and power actors making the decisions. Therefore, the decisions of a few powerful individuals will affect the general community at large, and subsequently that community’s environmental, residential, economic, and character elements. In this sense, the interactions of a few stakeholder organizations and key power actors will affect the ultimate decision on the transformation of SR 179, and thus the community of Sedona, Arizona.

With the fate of a designated scenic byway and the red-rock community of Sedona, Arizona as the backdrop, this applied community field study will identify stakeholders and analyze their perceptions of community impact. Furthermore, this applied investigation will provide a sociological model of how decision-making processes may be evaluated in terms of community impact.

3.0 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

A map can locate the concrete objects in a community, such as roads, buildings, and mountains, however, it cannot locate the invisible structures that control the social events within that community. Although invisible to the untrained eye, I believe the interactions of stakeholders and power actors are significantly influential with respect to a community’s well-being. Based upon the perceptions of stakeholders involved within a decision-making process

surrounding the augmentation of a scenic byway, this investigation seeks to identify community impact themes in Sedona, Arizona.

Within sociological literature, a repository of research illustrating community power and decision-making has developed (Hunter 1953; Mills 1963; Aiken & Mott 1970; Trounstein & Christensen 1982; Waste 1986; Chekki, Cahill, & Lofland 1994). One way of understanding how to analyze the impact of a decision-making process on a particular community is to identify the stakeholders and power actors of that community. Therefore, it is important to define the different classifications of social power, which can influence the organization of a community.

French and Raven (1959) outlined five diversified components for a typology of power:

- *Coercive*: power attained through fear of powerful persons and the consequences of dissent.
- *Legitimate or positional*: power attained through status and/or occupation.
- *Expert*: power attained through skills and/or knowledge.
- *Reward*: power attained through incentives (i.e. monetary, benefits, resources).
- *Referent*: power attained through personal abilities and/or traits (i.e. charisma).

Investigating the impact of a decision-making process on a particular community can be a daunting and complex task. Therefore, how do we as sociologists theoretically assess the impact of a community decision-making process? To answer this question, my approach is to identify the stakeholders and power actors, involved with the community decision-making process, and analyze their perceptions of community impact. In section 3.1, I will first provide a foundation for understanding “community” as a social field for investigating decision-making processes as it has been elucidated via sociological perspectives. Section 3.2, will serve to explore sociological methods that researchers may employ while identifying stakeholders and key power actors of a community. Coupling community theory with power identification methods, this study will present an analytical model of community impact⁴ and how that model was methodologically attained.

⁴ I am referring to a model of community impact based upon the perceptions of stakeholders.

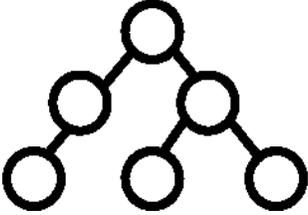
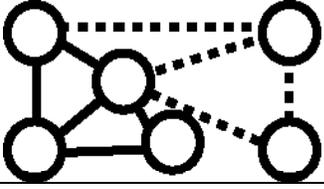
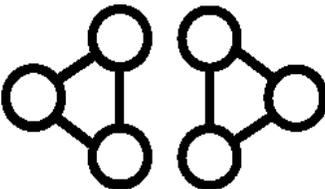
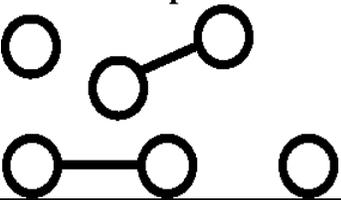
3.1 Stakeholder analysis and social perspectives

Theoretically speaking, How do sociologists investigate the impact of a decision-making process on a community? My approach is to identify the stakeholders and power actors, involved with the community decision-making process, and analyze their perceptions of community impact. The theoretical foundation of this stakeholder analysis links *interorganizational* (to assess the community field), *interactional* (to analyze the decision-making process at hand), and *community power research* (to identify community power actors and stakeholders) perspectives. Linking these approaches assumes that various features of a community, such as organizations or agencies, are interacting in some form.

Interorganizational Perspective

The *interorganizational* perspective illustrates how stakeholders may be networked within a community decision-making process. By examining the *interorganizational* power structure of stakeholders within a decision-making process, it becomes possible to identify the *community field* under investigation, and whether or not the community decision-making process has the capacity to support a field investigation. A community power structure typology (see Figure 1) created by Walton (1970) and Aiken (1970) classifies power structures as either *centralized* (pyramidal and factional) or *decentralized* (coalitional and amorphous). Sharp (2001: 406) summarizes this typology of interorganizational community power structures: In the pyramidal structure, power is concentrated within a single, cohesive leadership group. In the a factional structure, power is concentrated in two or more durable factions that are competing for power. In a coalitional structure, power is concentrated less strongly: actors and associations work together in fluid coalitions. An amorphous structure exists where power is diffuse, with little or no pattern of coalition building or centralized leadership.

Figure 1. Typology of Community Structures

	Centralized Pyramidal	De-Centralized Coalitional
Supports a community decision-making process		
Does not support a community decision-making process		

Using this typology of *interorganizational* power structure models, I will assess the community field under investigation as it reflects the community decision-making process surrounding SR 179 in Sedona, Arizona.

Interactional Perspective

To analyze the decision-making process at hand, the *interactional* perspective of community research, originated by Kaufman (1959) asserts that features of a community are inherently interacting in some form. Meaning, the social networks of stakeholders are associated with aspects of a community's political, economic, and ecological destiny. In the context of this study, a community's political, economic, and ecological qualities are impacted by a decision-making process surrounding the augmentation of a designated scenic road.

Contending with the *interactional* perspective, a stakeholder analysis of this impact investigation can be broken down into three components of community decision-making originated by Kaufman (1959: 11):

- (1) actors or participants
- (2) groups or associations through which action occurs
- (3) the states and phases of the action

A recurring topic for researchers has been the social structure of community and how it relates to a given community's capacity for local decision-making (Sharp 2001). For some time now, social theorists have frequently examined the relationship of social structures and power (Marx 1876, Weber 1941, 1947; Mills 1956, 1963). However, as classical social theory is too broad in scope for this analysis, I have chosen to narrow my investigation to analyzing community impact perceptions held by specific stakeholders networked in Sedona, Arizona's community decision-making process surrounding SR 179. In this light, connecting the *interactional* perspective with the *interorganizational* perspective may provide new insights into how decision-making processes impact the elements of a community (Sharp 2001), especially according to the "movers and shakers" (Trounstine and Christensen 1982) of a particular community.

3.2 Methods of community power analysis

"It was taken as axiomatic that community life is organized life, and that persons occupying 'offices' and public positions of trust would be involved in some manner in the power relations of the community." - Floyd Hunter in *Community Power Structure* (1958: 263)

This community field investigation of community power and its relation to community impact is based upon the above assertion: that those with power possess leverage which will lend those individuals the ability to influence a decision-making process. Robert Michels' *The Iron Law of Oligarchy* illustrated how a so-called democratic society has the propensity to move toward an oligarchical power structure. Meaning, there are only a few individuals (or organizations) actually holding power and decision-making capability over the general population. In this light, the stakeholders and power actors possessing community power are the few individuals who will make the ultimate decision for SR 179 in Sedona, Arizona. Subsequently, the ultimate decision of a few will have impact consequences affecting the entire community.

As for the methods employed to identify stakeholders and power actors of a community, the four most commonly employed approaches are: *positional*, *reputational*, *decisional*, and *social participation* (Moore 1990).

Positional Method

The *positional* method assumes that individuals in visibly important positions use their leverage and influence in the decision-making processes of a community. The *positional* method is used when a researcher seeks to identify (for a group or organization) where power resides in important positions, and who the individuals holding such positions are. This method is advantageous in that it is a relatively straightforward method to identify the groups and individuals who are decision-makers in a community (ibid).

Apart from its straightforwardness, the *positional* method has some disadvantages. For example, it considers only such power actors who are in formal power positions while it overlooks those who hold less visible but equally powerful positions (ibid). However, the *positional* method is the approach that must initially be employed before a researcher can transition into either the *reputational*, *decisional*, or *social participation* techniques. In other words, in order to locate power actors of a community, a researcher must begin with the simple inference that individuals occupying apparent powerful positions (i.e. the mayor or city council) will be more aware of other specific power actors in regards to the decision-making process at hand.

Reputational Method

Asserting that power actors will use their influence and thus acquire a reputation during a decision-making process, the *reputational* method of identifying community power is a more accurate method when examining a specific community decision-making process. However, the *reputational* approach is also more time consuming than the positional method in that it requires

more extensive interviews and qualitative analyses. In using the *reputational* method, it is necessary to question several knowledgeable individuals on who they perceive to be the power actors of the community. If a certain individual(s) is frequently named by persons holding various degrees of *positional* leverage in the community, it becomes increasingly probable that he or she has gained a reputation of power in the community as well (ibid).

One disadvantage to the *reputational* method is the difficulty of identifying new power actors of the community. Nonetheless, with the employment of the *reputational* method, it becomes increasingly possible to identify such power actors who are not in obvious, or very visible, positions, but who do have a strong political influence in the community. The *reputational* method also distinguishes the power actors who are manipulating the leverage held by the more passive power actors (ibid).

Decisional Method

By looking directly into the decision-making process, the *decisional* method identifies power actors by determining who is actively involved in the decision at hand. The *decisional* method is useful when an investigator wants to identify the active power actors and the specific roles played in a decision-making process of the community. However, this method can be qualitatively complex and time consuming (ibid), as it requires access to information held by stakeholder organizations and/or power actors.

Social-Participation Method

When an investigator seeks to identify community actors who acquire power through participation of voluntary organizations, the *social-participation* method is useful. With the employment of this method, it becomes increasingly possible to identify such power actors who are active in the local community. However, the *social-participation* method alone may neglect such power actors who are issue specific (ibid). For example, an individual participating in the

efforts of a local non-profit environmental organization may or may not be involved in the environmental decisions regarding the augmentation of a local scenic byway.

4.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This section of the investigation will serve to discuss the level and type of study being conducted (section 4.1), the populations being studied (section 4.2), as well as the methodological techniques (section 4.3) used to identify an exhaustive representation of stakeholder organizations and power actors in the community of Sedona, Arizona.

4.1 Level and type of study

This investigation seeks to present a community impact analysis based upon the identification and interaction of stakeholders and power actors. Therefore, this investigation represents a *community field study* in which data will be collected from stakeholders and power actors involved in the SR 179 decision making process in Sedona, Arizona.

Designed to be both an exploratory and descriptive study, this investigation is based upon both primary and secondary forms of data. Primary data, gathered via *topic-focused-interviews*, will create qualitatively structured classifications of how the expansion of SR 179 will impact the community of Sedona, Arizona according to the perceptions of *agency stakeholders* involved in this decision-making process. Secondary data, obtained through *focus groups*⁵ and *demographics*⁶ will identify the impact of SR 179's expansion according to non-agency *community stakeholders*,⁷ as well as provide a clearer picture of community impact for Sedona, Arizona as a whole.

⁵ Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT).

⁶ United States Census and City of Sedona.

⁷ By *non-agency community stakeholders*, I am referring to classifications of groups that do not hold community power per se, but who are directly affected by the outcome of SR 179's decision-making process. The non-agency *community stakeholders* include groups such as: residents, merchants, business owners, outdoor enthusiasts, and so on.

4.2 Populations studied

To obtain an exhaustive list of the various stakeholders impacted by the augmentation of SR 179's expansion, I have classified "stakeholders" into two categories: (1) *agency stakeholders* and (2) *community stakeholders*. These two categories will represent the populations studied in this investigation.

The target population studied in this research will be comprised of power actors working within the seven *agency stakeholder* organizations involved with the SR 179 decision-making process in Sedona, Arizona. *Agency stakeholders* in this investigation are operationally defined as those government organizations with jurisdictional responsibility and authority along SR 179 and include:

- Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT)
- Coconino National Forest (CNF)
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Big Park Regional Coordinating Council (BPRCC)
- City of Sedona
- Coconino County
- Yavapai County

In order to present a community impact analysis based upon the perceptions of *agency stakeholders*, individual power actors will participate in *topic-focused-interviews*. Therefore, the units of analysis are the *agency stakeholder* organizations, but the actual units of observation are the human power actors working within those agencies.

As stakeholders are certainly not limited to government agencies, the second population studied will be comprised of non-governmental groups termed *community stakeholders*. By *community stakeholders*, I am referring to classifications of groups that do not hold political power per se, but who are directly impacted by the outcome of SR 179's decision-making process. Examples of *community stakeholders* living in Sedona Arizona include:

- residential community
- local merchants
- art and cultural community
- outdoor enthusiasts
- economic community

- tourism industry
- developers/real estate
- religious/spiritual community

4.3 Techniques

Primary Data

The first phase of analyzing community impact will begin by collecting primary data from *agency stakeholders* involved in the decision-making process surrounding SR 179 in Sedona, Arizona. To do this, power actors will be identified within the *agency stakeholder* organizations by employing a combination of the *Positional, Reputational, Decisional*, and *Social Participation* methodological approaches (refer to section 3.2). While employing the former methods, perceptions of community impact will be gathered through personal *topic-focused-interviews* with individual power actors working within the *agency stakeholder* organizations. To structure the interviewing process, the “Community Stakeholder Interview Guide” (see Appendix), designed by this author, will be used. Once primary data is collected from power actors, it will be analyzed and organized into classifications based upon recurring community impact themes regarding the augmentation of SR 179.

Secondary Data

The second phase of analyzing community impact will consist of secondary forms of data obtained from the Arizona Department of Transportation, the United States Census, and the City of Sedona. Secondary forms of data will be comprised of (1) *focus groups*,⁸ (2) *community interviews*,⁹ and (3) *demographics*.¹⁰

Focus groups and *community interviews*, conducted by the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), will provide secondary data from the non-agency *community stakeholders* affected by the decision-making process surrounding SR 179. Once obtained, *focus*

⁸ Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ United States Census and City of Sedona.

group and *community interview* data will also be analyzed and organized into classifications based upon recurring community impact themes regarding the augmentation of SR 179. Furthermore, *demographics*, collected by the United States Census and the City of Sedona, will provide descriptive information pertaining to a community impact analysis of the community of Sedona, Arizona. Sedona's demographic data, consisting of population characteristics, growth, and available land for development (residential and commercial), will be analyzed as it pertains to the augmentation of Scenic Route 179.

Primary and Secondary Data

Complementing primary (*topic-focused-interviews*) with secondary (*focus groups*, *community interviews*, and *demographics*) forms of data will allow this researcher to identify an representative list of all the various stakeholders impacting the community decision-making process surrounding SR 179. Analyzing this data will provide a more comprehensive picture of how Sedona, Arizona as a community will be impacted by this decision. Further, analyzing this data will highlight arguments *for* and *against* the augmentation of SR 179, as they pertain to the Environmental, Residential, Local-Commercial, and Community Character levels of community impact (see section 2.0).

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Findings expected

Research indicates that individuals holding multiple positions within community organizations also tend to occupy important networking positions, and thus are powerfully involved in community decision-making processes (Beaulieu & Ryan 1984). Therefore, by using a combination of the *positional*, *reputational*, *decisional*, and *social-participation* power identification methods in regards to the decision-making process surrounding Scenic Route 179, I expect to reveal a model of community impact based upon the perceptions of stakeholders networked in Sedona, Arizona. This social model will become more evident as power actors and

the various stakeholders are identified and analyzed. Coupling primary data gathered from the target population (*agency stakeholders*) with secondary data (*community stakeholders*), I expect to reveal the pragmatic implications of presenting stakeholder analyses in communities impacted by social events.

5.2 Limitations

In conclusion, this investigation is intended to be a qualitative impact analysis that seeks to build upon previous research regarding stakeholders within community decision-making processes. To control for the inherent limitations of the *positional*, *reputational*, *decisional*, and *social-participation* methods, I will employ a combination of all four techniques, thus reducing a rift in data collection. Finally, as every community is socially unique, the model of community impact that I uncover cannot be assumed to be universally applicable for all communities. However, this investigation can serve as a preliminary guide for other investigations in peer communities demographically similar to that of Sedona, Arizona.

5.3 Final Remarks

Why might a sociologist or community, for the matter, care to identify stakeholders and analyze perceptions of community impact in relation to a localized decision-making process? This researcher believes the interactions of stakeholders and power actors are influential in regards to a community's well-being as the elements of community are impacted by the decisions of a few.

Often times, when a major community decision is being made, environmental impact assessments are conducted to reassure community members that inevitable environmental consequences have been accounted for. In the same sense, I believe it is equally important for community stakeholders and power actors to consider the consequences of community impact for major decision-making processes. Ferdinand Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* classifications of community types illustrated the fundamental differences between a community

of close individual bonds and a community of rationalized distance. Max Weber's theory of *rationalization* illustrated how societies have the tendency to consider only the most efficient means to production, but not the consequences of those means. In the context of Tonnies' and Weber's community theories, I believe the time has come for not just sociologists, but community members everywhere to search for an understanding of community impact in regards to local decision-making processes. Further, I believe that applied community research does not have to be methodologically complicated. With the employment of basic power identification methods (Positional, Reputational, Decisional, and Social Participation), this study will help to reveal the significance of community impact analyses in regards to decision-making processes occurring throughout communities in the world.

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7.0 APPENDIX A

STAKEHOLDER/POWER ACTOR COMMUNITY IMPACT INTERVIEW-GUIDE